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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine levels of perceived stress associated with the office of public community/junior college president in the southeastern United States. The study investigated the following: (1) the ways that stress, as perceived by selected community/junior college presidents, relates to certain job functions; (2) the importance of these job functions; and (3) the methods used by these presidents to counter stress. Questionnaires were mailed to 276 presidents, and 175 usable questionnaires were returned. Study findings included the following: (1) the average age of the respondents was 52; (2) respondents had an average of 10.5 years of experience as a college president; (3) 94.3% were white and 95.4% were male; (4) 86.3% had a doctorate; (5) 44% of the respondents were employed at colleges located in urban areas; (6) the presidents perceived the stress level of the majority of their job functions to be "not very stressful," with the exception of Faculty Relationships and Legal Matters, which were rated "very stressful"; (7) in rating the importance of 21 major job responsibilities, presidents confirmed that these individual responsibilities were important to the functioning of the presidency; and (8) counter-stress activities such as exercise, seeking the advice of a physician, and drinking alcohol, were not widely used by the respondents, although almost all engaged in some form of relaxation on occasion. Survey responses are appended. (WJT)

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STRESS IN PERSPECTIVE FOR COMMUNITY/JUNIOR COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT: STRESS IS AN OUTGROWTH OF RESPONSIBILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH LEADERSHIP ROLES OF COLLEGE PRESIDENTS. THE RESULTS OF STRESS DON'T ALWAYS CAUSE HARMFUL SIDE EFFECTS. THE KEY IS REACHING A PROPER BALANCE BETWEEN STRESS AND OUR REACTIONS TO STRESSFUL SITUATIONS. DISEASE, MENTAL BREAKDOWNS, AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE ARE ONLY A FEW OF THE MORE FAMILIAR AILMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH AN UNBALANCED RELATIONSHIP. PREVIOUS RESEARCH STUDIES AND REPORTS INDICATE THAT MANY COMMUNITY/JUNIOR COLLEGE PRESIDENTS NEITHER RECOGNIZE THE STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR POSITIONS NOR FULLY APPRECIATE THE POTENTIAL DAMAGES RELATED TO STRESSORS. ANALYZED WERE MEASURES OF LEVELS OF PERCEIVED STRESSORS AMONG PRESIDENTS OF 175 PUBLIC COMMUNITY/JUNIOR COLLEGES WITHIN THE AREA OF THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS. THIS REPORT PROVIDES: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA; RATINGS OF 21 MAJOR JOB RESPONSIBILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRESIDENCY; THE PERCEIVED STRESS LEVELS ASSOCIATED WITH THE 21 VARIABLES; AN ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENCE BETWEEN STRESS AND IMPORTANCE; AND A RATING OF SELECTED COUNTER-STRESS ACTIVITIES USED BY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS.

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STRESS IN PERSPECTIVE FOR COMMUNITY/ JUNIOR COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

Literature concerning job related stress and its effect upon individual performance is abundant. From much of this literature, it is reasonable for one to conclude that mental and/or physical stress is deemed to be harmful and should be avoided. In today's modern world it is unrealistic and in most instances nonproductive for an individual to be in a state totally void of stress. Stress is a natural outgrowth from essential responsibilities associated with leadership roles of college presidents-- little if anything could be accomplished without it. Any kind of normal activity can produce considerable stress without causing harmful effects (Selye 1974). This is not to imply that all stress is good and that stress can not cause harmful side effects. The key is reaching a proper balance between stress and reaction to stressful situations; thereby developing coping skills for stress.

Virtually all human activities are essentially manifestations of a continuous decision-making process and produce stress. Levels of stress are elevated as these processes become (or are perceived as) personally damaging or unpleasant; that is, become the

state of distress. When distress, caused for example by a physical menace, reaches high levels an individual instinctively prepares either to stand ground or run; the "fight or flight response" (Cannon 1935). In today's complex society, individual reactions not only apply to the danger of death or injury, but also to the danger of emotional and/or material loss.

Functionally, every community/junior college president is not only a personal decision-maker, but is also a social decision-maker. The alternatives which administrators face exist not only in relationship to themselves, but also in relationship to others. Because personal and social decisions are completely and inextricably interwoven, the decision-making process often causes conflict and anguish. These conflicts may exist only as a conjecture about what might happen as a result of decisions made and/or left undecided. Speculation on decisions and events makes leaders prey to anxiety even in the absence of specific threats. The presence of too much anxiety can cause decision making process to be contanimated with states of fight or flight. The consequences of living

in these states can cause physical and mental problems.

Decisions and events that normally produce responses based on personal desires at times are suppressed for the good of others producing varying physical and psychological costs (Grammateos, 1980, p. 18). Heart and arterial disease, chronic indigestion and ulcers, migraine headaches, mental breakdown, and alcoholism and drug addiction are only a few of the more familiar ailments associated with such distress. The question of whether or not stress takes a heavy toll on ones physical and/or mental health ultimately depends on how people handle the stresses in their lives.

Behavioral scientists have researched human ability to develop coping skills in dealing with stress (Veninga and Spradley, 1981). Leadership positions in corporate America have long been recognized as potentially stress producing (Vaughn, 1982). The influence of extreme stress over time often results in the loss of many top executives through resignation, mental and/or physical debilitation and premature death.

A number of anti-stress practitioners have developed programs designed to assist individuals with establishing coping mechanisms to alleviate stress. Stress should be recognized as a fundamental hazard for top executives in education as well as in the corporate world of work. Authors of reports in professional educational journals indicated that educational administrators, particularly those in top leadership categories, were subjected to high stress phenomena (Kaiser and Polcyznski, 1982).

Unfortunately, many community/junior college presidents do not recognize the high levels of stress associated with their positions, nor do they fully appreciate the potential damages related to stressors, and have not developed appropriate coping attitudes. (Welt, 1984). The inability to recognize and appropriately resolve threats to one's health or career can be compromising.

The traditional approaches to dealing with stress and alleviation of tension (smoking. drinking, taking medicines such as tranquilizers, and eating too much of the wrong kinds of food) are not compatible with being physically fit. Exercise and healthful diet

represent a first step in neutralizing the effects of stress in today's competitive work world.

Research indicates that stress is increasing for collegiate level employees; this is particularly true for community/junior college presidents (Schuster and Bowen, 1985). The position of college president and the expectations of various publics, with respect to their demands on the president, have changed in recent years. Often today's college president is expected to function as a fund raiser, a politician, a soothsayer, and a problem solver (Schuler, 1981).

Schuler analyzed situations contributing to the stress experienced by community college presidents. These included; (a) the pressures resulting from critical schedules and deadlines, (b) the multiplicity and rapidness at which changes must occur, (c) the inability to minimize available time to accomplish tasks, (d) the fear of failure, (e) the uncertainty of future career and life choices, (f) the absence of clearly defined job descriptions or role definitions that are understood and accepted by those in authority, and (g) the personal feeling of being unfulfilled, but not knowing what to do about such

feelings. Many individuals are naturally afraid of their impulses, memories, capacities, potentialities, and future destinies. There is a tendency to transfer these apprehensions to real or anticipated situations and/or problems thereby producing stress.

Stress management techniques are designed to assist individuals in their efforts to cope with stress and turn it to good use, by eliminating self-defeating thought patterns which are rooted in a lack of self-confidence. Community college presidents who become aware of and practice personal management techniques for building positive self concepts are reducing job related stress for themselves and for others within their colleges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to measure with a modified, existing instrument (Edwards 1984) the levels of perceived stress associated with the office of public community/junior college president in the Southeastern United States. In order to determine perceived stress it was necessary to investigate the following: (a) the ways stress, as perceived by

selected community/junior college presidents, related to certain job functions, (b) the importance of these job functions, and (c) the range of counter-stress activities used by these presidents.

Methodology

Questionnaires were mailed to 276 public community/junior college presidents of institutions accredited by the College Commission of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A total of 175 usable questionnaires were returned and coded into computer format for processing with SPSS and SAS procedures.

Date[1] were processed in segments corresponding to sections of the questionnaire: Demographic, Stress Levels, Importance Levels, and Counter-stress Activities.

Demographics

The demographic section of the questionnaire provided an overview of the population's characteristics. The average age of the 175

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[1]The raw data initially were collected for an Ed.D. Dissertation at Auburn University by Norman Pinney, Jr.. This report represents a partial reinterpretation of those data and their first authorized publication.

community/junior college presidents responding to the questionnaires was 52 they had an average of 10.5 years
experience as a college president. The majority of the presidents, 167 (95.4%), were males and 8 (4.0%) were females. The majority, 165 (94.3%), were caucasians and 5 (2.9%) were black. Their educational backgrounds indicated that 152 (86.3%) held Ph.D. or Ed.D. degrees and 21 (12.0%) had Ed.S. or M.S. degrees. Ninety five percent (166) were married and 132 (75.4%) attended church. Hobbies and recreational activities were used by 150 (85.7%) as a form of relaxation.

Of the 175 colleges 77 (44%) were located in urban areas. The majority, 108 (61.7%), were governed by a local board, 147 (84.0%) had less than 4,900 full-time students in their student bodies and 45 (25.7%) reported the number of part-time students to be more than 4,900.

Stress Levels

Presidents responding to the questionnaire rated the perceived stress levels due to their positions. A

4 point rating scale on 21 variables, associated with the office of president, was used. The scale ranged between "extremely stressful" and "not at all stressful." The 21 variables were obtained from various studies, journal articles, and textbooks that specified duties of public community/junior college presidents.

Insert Table 1 about here.

In almost every instance, the presidents rated the Stress Levels, Table 1, of their jobs as being not very stressful. The two exceptions were for "Faculty Relationships" and "Legal Matters" which were rated as "very stressful". These findings concur with those of other researchers regarding perceptions of job related stress factors. The majority of community/junior college presidents neither perceived nor acknowledged high levels of stress as being associated with their job responsibilities.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Importance Levels

Presidents were asked to rate the importance level of each of the 21 major job responsibilities associated with their positions. A 4 point rating scale with rankings between "extremely important" to "not important" was used (Table 2). Their responses confirmed that individuals responsibilities were in fact important to the functioning in the community/junior presidency.

Distribution statistics in Table 3 of stress item ratings indicated mean stress responses ranged between 1.73 and 2.57 and standard deviations ranged from .562 to .863. The importance item means ranged between 2.78 and 3.74, with standard deviations ranging between .501 and .749.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Linkage Between Stress and Importance Item Responses

Table 4 reports characteristics of stress items and importance items independently and tests the

hypothesis of chance endorsement for each item. The chi-square test with 3 degrees of freedom was used to compute significance level of all items (* indicates significance at the .05 level).

In addition, the right margin in Table 4 reflects test of independence between stress and importance items ordered sequentially by item or problem areas. Chi-square analysis of independence resulted in the identification of 10 significant stress-importance relationships. By chance one would expect two false positives.

Insert Table 4 about here.

Counter-Stress Activities

The survey instrument proposed fifteen coping activities, with findings reported as Table 5. Presidents were asked to indicate on a 4 point rating scale ranging from "Always" to "Never," which coping activities, if any, they utilized. Data indicated the presidents made very little effort to use the coping strategies listed on the instrument. These data may

indicate that those responding to the study may be operating within their "stress comfort zone" levels. Activities and/or tasks performed within an individual's stress comfort zone produce neither strain nor slack. The parameter for these comfort zones vary with personalities and their ability to adapt to stress. Some individuals are better able work within their stress comfort zones because of their positive attitudes. A positive attitude tends to neutralize or enable individuals to capatilize on the energy created from job related stress.

This interprelation is not the accepted conclusion reached in most research studies. Other researchers have tended to suggest that the presidents don't perceive their responsibilities as stressful with consequent negative effects on their productivity and health.

Insert Table 5 about here.

Results and Conclusions

Current data indicate that the majority of the

presidents were married, middle-aged, white males, having a doctorate and more than ten years experience in the position of community/junior college president. They participated in church and hobby activities. The institutions which they administered were mostly governed by local boards, located in rural areas, and had an enrollment of less than 4,900 full or part-time students.

The data further indicated that presidents rated most of their administrative responsibilities as "not very stressful". The two exceptions to this, "Faculty relationships" and "Legal matters" may have been very closely related items in the minds of the presidents. In recent years, as evidenced by numbers of lawsuits, faculty members have been less hesitant to use legal action to resolve differences with their administrators.

Although administrative duties don't seem stressful to presidents, these duties were perceived by them as being "extremely" or "very" important. The importance of these tasks and the significance they have to institutional success as well as to the administrators themselves, elevated them as prime

suspects as stress producing agents.

Counter-stress activities were not widely utilized by presidents. One possible reason may be that the presidents either did not perceive, or had not acknowledged, the stress present in many of their administrative tasks. Although almost all presidents engaged in some form of relaxation, the data indicated that relaxation activities were "sometimes" activities. Special efforts, therefore, should be undertaken to broaden awareness of benefits produced by participation in counter-stress activities.

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Table 1. Majority Responses to Stress Items

Item	Majority Response
Long-range planning:	111 of 174:(64%): "not very stressful"
Community needs assessment:	117 of 174:(67%): "not very stressful"
Staff relationships:	88 of 174: (51%): "not very stressful"
Student relationships:	111 of 173:(64%): "not very stressful"
Faculty relationships:	78 of 174: (45%): "very stressful"
Community relationships:	99 of 174: (57%): "not very stressful"
Guideline compliance:	87 of 174: (50%): "not very stressful"
Fiscal management:	75 of 174: (43%): "not very stressful"
Board relationships:	84 of 172: (49%): "not very stressful"
Curriculum evaluation:	106 of 174:(61%): "not very stressful"
Supervision of instruction:	121 of 172:(70%): "not very stressful"
Fund raising:	79 of 174: (45%): "not very stressful"
Accreditation:	91 of 174: (52%): "not very stressful"
Classrooms/laboratories:	102 of 174:(59%): "not very stressful"
Legal matters:	68 of 174: (39%): "very stressful"
Library:	105 of 174:(60%): "not very stressful"
New construction:	74 of 171: (43%): "not very stressful"
Maintenance:	97 of 171: (57%): "not very stressful"
Legislative relations:	78 of 171: (46%): "not very stressful"
Alumni relations:	102 of 172:(59%): "not very stressful"
Institutional analysis:	101 of 172:(59%): "not very stressful"

Table 2. Majority Responses to Importance Items

Item	Majority Response
Long-range planning:	98 of 174: (56%): "extremely important"
Community needs assessment:	96 of 174: (55%): "Very important"
Staff relationships:	126 of 174:(72%): "Extremely important"
Student relationships:	90 of 174: (52%): "very important"
Faculty relationships:	128 of 174:(74%): "extremely important"
Community relationships:	113 of 174:(65%): "extremely important"
Guideline compliance:	115 of 174:(66%): "extremely important"
Fiscal management:	136 of 174:(78%): "extremely important"
Board relationships:	129 of 172:(75%): "extremely important"
Curriculum evaluation:	118 of 174:(68%): "very important"
Supervision of instruction:	111 of 173:(64%): "very important"
Fund raising:	91 of 174: (52%): "very important"
Accreditation:	98 of 174: (56%): "extremely important"
Classrooms/laboratories:	118 of 173:(68%): "very important"
Legal matters:	98 of 174: (56%): "very important"
Library:	115 of 173:(66%): "very important"
New construction:	97 of 174: (56%): "very important"
Maintenance:	116 of 174:(67%): "very important"
Legislative relations:	95 of 173: (55%): "extremely important"
Alumni relations:	91 of 174: (52%): "very important"
Institutional analysis:	115 of 174:(66%): "very important"

Table 3. Distribution Statistics for Stress and Importance Items, N=155

Stress Items						Importance Items					
Variable	Mean	S D	Sum	Mn	Mx	Variable	Mean	S D	Sum	Mn	Mx
SPLAN	2.08	0.613	323	1	4	IPLAN	3.54	0.524	550	2	4
SCOMNEED	1.88	0.562	291	1	3	ICOMNEED	3.29	0.602	510	2	4
SSTAFREL	2.46	0.695	381	1	4	ISTAFREL	3.69	0.504	572	1	4
SSTUREL	1.90	0.642	295	0	4	ISTUREL	3.40	0.576	527	1	4
SFACREL	2.57	0.729	399	1	4	IFACREL	3.69	0.501	573	1	4
SCOMREL	2.03	0.715	315	1	4	ICOMREL	3.59	0.542	557	1	4
SCOMPLY	2.41	0.803	373	1	4	ICOMPLY	3.18	0.567	494	1	4
SFISCAL	2.52	0.863	391	1	4	IFISCAL	3.74	0.507	580	1	4
SBORDREL	2.35	0.851	365	0	4	IBORDREL	3.65	0.687	567	0	4
SCURRIC	1.94	0.606	301	1	3	ICURRIC	3.14	0.539	487	2	4
SSUPINS	1.91	0.574	296	0	4	ISUPINS	3.11	0.660	482	0	4
SFUND	2.23	0.812	346	1	4	IFUND	3.03	0.754	471	1	4
SACCR	2.28	0.777	353	1	4	IACCR	3.48	0.627	540	1	4
SCLASLAB	1.81	0.635	280	0	4	ICLASLAB	3.00	0.634	465	1	4
SLEGAL	2.56	0.838	397	1	4	ILEGAL	3.19	0.645	495	1	4
SLIBRARY	1.70	0.572	264	1	4	ILIBRARY	3.04	0.606	472	1	4
SNEWCON	2.24	0.838	347	0	4	INEWCON	3.12	0.696	484	1	4
SMAINT	2.05	0.694	316	1	4	IMAINT	3.14	0.600	488	1	4
SLEGREL	2.33	0.705	359	0	4	ILEGREL	3.40	0.743	527	0	4
SALUMNI	1.73	0.596	268	0	3	IALUMNI	2.78	0.749	431	1	4
SINANAL	2.07	0.694	321	0	4	IINANAL	3.22	0.564	500	1	4

Table 4. Chance Tested (α=.05) Stress and Importance Response Frequencies

Num	Stress					Importance					Str X Imp	
	Response a	b	c	d	Chi Square	Response e	f	g	h	Chi Square	df	Chi Square
15	1	33	104	24	143*	93	6	2	0	163*	6	2.91
16	0	17	109	38	168*	60	29	12	0	133*	4	3.58
17	11	61	85	7	107*	118	45	0	1	225*	6	2.96
18	2	20	105	36	149*	72	85	6	1	139*	9	6.60
19	15	71	71	7	88*	119	44	0	1	228*	6	29.83
20	5	30	95	34	106*	103	59	1	1	179*	9	13.79
21	16	50	81	17	70*	44	108	11	1	170*	9	10.51
22	24	52	73	15	51*	126	35	2	1	253*	9	19.35*
23	16	47	82	17	72*	122	35	4	1	236*	9	8.63
24	0	25	101	38	135*	39	112	13	0	183*	4	5.60
25	1	14	117	30	203*	42	104	15	2	151*	9	20.92*
26	10	49	74	31	54*	46	83	32	3	80*	9	44.60*
27	11	42	88	23	83*	91	65	6	2	142*	9	27.48*
28	1	15	97	49	135*	29	111	19	4	169*	9	17.99*
29	21	64	64	15	52*	51	96	15	2	129*	9	62.22*
30	1	6	97	58	154*	33	108	20	2	159*	9	19.40*
31	9	50	72	30	54*	50	91	20	3	108*	9	36.53*
32	3	33	93	32	106*	42	110	9	3	176*	9	12.46
33	4	66	75	16	93*	88	65	6	4	131*	9	21.20*
34	0	11	94	57	139*	24	85	48	7	83*	6	23.83*
35	4	33	96	29	113*	48	109	5	2	182*	9	15.85
Meta-Analysis											167	406.23*

Note: * indicates significance at the .05 level.

Table 5. Majority Responses to Counter-Stress Activities

Item	Majority Response
Pay more attention to a healthy diet:	84 of 175: (48%): "more than usual"
Get more exercise:	67 of 175: (38%): "sometimes"
Work at a hobby:	77 of 175: (44%): "sometimes"
Take a mini-vacation:	104 of 175:(60%): "sometimes"
Seek advice of physician:	93 of 175: (53%): "never"
Go to professional meetings:	114 of 175:(65%): "sometimes"
Take refuge in prayer;meditation:	95 of 175: (54%): "sometimes"
Take refuge in solitude; fishing or hunting:	84 of 175: (48%): "sometimes"
Discuss problems with spouse:	94 of 175: (54%): "sometimes"
Seek relaxation among those unrelated to academics:	93 of 175: (53%): "sometimes"
Play a musical instrument:	131 of 175:(75%): "never"
Watch TV:	116 of 175:(66%): "sometimes"
Drink alcoholic beverages:	87 of 175: (50%): "never"
Drive your car fast:	125 of 175:(71%): "never"
Read novels and other non-academics:	95 of 175: (54%): "sometimes"
Other (unspecified):	13 of 175: (08%): "more than usual"

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